

The People-Are-Dumb School of Diplomacy Has Reopened

BY ERNEST CONINE

Whatever happened to Jimmy Carter's campaign promises of open diplomacy? Judging by the Administration's ultrasensitive reaction to out-of-school disclosures on arms-control talks with the Russians, the Administration has joined in the Henry Kissinger school's attitude that the people are too damned dumb to be trusted.

Carter came into office with the populist premise that, in a democracy, foreign policy is not all that different from domestic issues. The people should be told what is going on while there is still time for their opinions to count.

To his credit, the President initially tried to live up to this ideal. When Secretary of State Vance went to Moscow in March with Carter's opening hand on arms control, the details of his proposals were pretty well publicized in advance.

The Russians, however, were incensed. They let it be known that they preferred the secretive negotiating techniques of Richard

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Nixon and Kissinger. And the Kremlin, in the end, has had its way.

Carter, early in the game, agreed to keep Congress informed on SALT II negotiating details. Vance, arms-control chief Paul Warnke and Defense Secretary Harold Brown have all appeared before the Senate Armed Services Committee and other bodies.

But their briefings were mostly private. And, when details leaked inevitably (and properly) to the press, the Administration reacted in ways not all that different from those of the Nixon crowd.

Hawkish expert Paul Nitze, made cynical by his experience in arms-control negotiations under previous administrations, charged that the Carter Administration was preparing to hand nuclear superiority to the Russians on a platter. Material was leaked to columnists who, like Nitze, were close to Sen. Henry M. Jackson (D-Wash.).

Warnke argues that the prospective new SALT agreement would actually enhance U.S. security. But the Administration does not really challenge Nitze's charge that the limitations proposed would fail to prevent the Russians from keeping enough big missiles with multiple warheads to destroy this country's land-based deterrent sometime in the 1980s.

The United States would not have a comparable ability, needed to keep the peace, unless it was prepared to spend \$40 billion to \$50 billion for an advanced new missile, the

MX. But the critics fear that other provisions of the prospective pact would inhibit the exercise of this option, thus resulting in a permanent, dangerous Russian advantage.

It is interesting that the Administration does not deny the factual accuracy of the disclosures that it complains about; its objections (shades of Nixon and Kissinger) are to the disclosures themselves.

David Aaron, a White House aide, circulated a memo through the State Department, CIA and Pentagon ordering that "all responses to requests from Congress for (SALT data and analyses) should be cleared" through a White House screening group.

Aviation Week, which had carried a story on a memorandum reflecting the worries of the Joint Chiefs of Staff concerning the SALT negotiations, found itself shut out of an important official briefing.

Obviously coordinated efforts have been made to discredit Nitze and congressional sources who have dared to talk out of school.

Carl Marcy, codirector of an Administration-approved group called the American Committee on East-West Accord, accused Nitze of "unwise and unauthorized release of classified information and of seeking to substitute his judgment and that of the narrow group for which he speaks for the judgment of the secretary of state, the defense secretary and the President."

Such words, needless to say, are reminiscent of the Papa-knows-best certitudes uttered by previous administrations during the Vietnam war.

Sen. John C. Culver (D-Iowa) and three other dovish senators, meanwhile, circulated a letter expressing "very serious concern about the effects of these disclosures on the SALT negotiations." They demanded an investigation into alleged leaks by the armed services subcommittee headed by Jackson, and urged that testimony on SALT developments be shifted to a different forum.

Carter's own public reaction has been mild; he has commented only that the leaks were "ill-advised." But the impression persists that the Culver group's letter—and certainly the blast from Marcy—had White House inspiration.

The situation has its funny side. Here is a case where the strong-defense faction in Congress is being accused of recklessly violating national security. And its accusers are the dovish crowd that has done so much leaking in the past.

However, the issue at hand is very unfunny, indeed. The Administration is saying, in effect, that it is very happy to keep key senators informed of negotiating progress with the Russians, but only as long as they don't go public with any misgivings—and the reasons for those misgivings.

In short, the idea is to present the Senate and the American people with a completed SALT II agreement sometime next year, when it will be too late for informed public debate to have an effect.

This would be convenient for the U.S. negotiators who, like all diplomats, prefer secrecy. It would be convenient for the President, who badly needs a foreign-policy "victory" to give his sagging popularity a boost. And it would be convenient for the Russians.

However, such a fait accompli would not be in the interest of the American people, who have the ultimate stake in what is going on.

It should be noted that pressures resulting from the leaks already seem to have produced an important Soviet concession: The Russians reportedly have agreed to less-onerous restrictions on the cruise missile.

In any event, it's worth remembering that the "classified" information that was leaked did not consist of U.S. military secrets. It dealt with Pentagon uneasiness over American concessions, with Russian reactions to American proposals and with compromises on which agreement was near.

The trouble is that these compromises, in the eyes of many arms-control experts, have been so one-sided in favor of the Soviet Union that their acceptance could produce a perilous tilt in the nuclear balance of terror.

These critics may or may not be right. But the point is that they should be heard now rather than later, when the treaty will be presented as a final product that cannot be rejected without setting off a new arms race and gravely damaging U.S.-Soviet relations.